

Differentiated Instruction

Description

The wide range of academic diversity found in schools today presents both a challenge and an opportunity to all teachers. The goal of a comprehensive language arts program remains the provision of universal access for all students to an intellectually rich and challenging language arts curriculum and instruction in addition to whatever specialized intervention may be required.

Universal access occurs when teachers provide curriculum and instruction in ways that allow all learners in the classroom to participate and to achieve the instructional and behavioral goals of general education and the core curriculum. Teachers will succeed in providing universal access if they teach in heterogeneous, inclusive classrooms and consistently and systematically integrate instructional strategies that are responsive to the needs of typical learners, gifted learners, less proficient readers, English language learners, and students who are eligible for and receiving special education services.

Strategies

The following is a basic list of instructional considerations that can be applied across all phases of instruction.

- **Clarify behavioral expectations** for the lesson. Students need to understand the parameters within which they are working.
- **Provide time for students to collect their thoughts** before having to speak. You may want to ask a student a question and then pause before you assist the student in responding. You may also want to ask the student a question, state that you want the student to think about it, and indicate that you will be back for the response in a minute. Another possibility is to tell students the questions that you will be asking during tomorrow's class in order to give them time, overnight, to prepare their responses. These suggestions can be very helpful for a student experiencing a language disability or for a student who uses an alternative, augmentative communication device.
- **Use visuals throughout the lesson.** Outlining key ideas, writing key phrases and vocabulary on the overhead projector or board, or putting notes on the overhead projector or board are critical supports for many students. You may want to provide some students with a copy of your overheads or notes ahead of time so that they can follow along. For other students, make a partial or blank copy of the graphic or outline you will be using and require students to write in key information as it is discussed. It is very helpful if you model this filling-in procedure for students. It also helps them to overcome problems with spelling or capturing complex ideas using only a few words.
- **Schedule opportunities for preteaching and reteaching** key concepts, vocabulary words, and skills. Students will most likely need more than one opportunity to gain understanding and fluency.

- **Assist in time management.** When requiring students to complete projects or long-term assignments, provide a calendar that breaks down the requirements by due dates. Go over the checklist with the students and monitor their use of the checklist and task completion as the assignment proceeds. Many students will experience significant difficulties in self-managing the time needed to complete complex and long-term assignments.
- **Consider alternative means for demonstrating understanding.** Think beyond the common modes of reading and writing. Students could present information orally, create a poster or visual representation of a work, tape-record their ideas, or act out their understanding. These activities take into consideration multiple intelligences and can provide access for all learners in the classroom.
- **Have students begin all work in class.** Prior to class dismissal, check to ensure that each student has a good start and understands what is expected.
- **Build vocabulary** by teaching the meaning of prefixes and suffixes. Also, focus on synonyms and antonyms of words and have students define the words in their own words.
- **Explicitly teach note-taking skills.** Model note-taking as you present information to the classroom. Collect and review the students' notes and provide suggestions for improvement.
- **Use recorded readings.** Some students can benefit from the use of books on tape/CD. Be sure that students are actively engaged and following along as they listen to the tape/CD.
- **Balance student-focused and directed activities with teacher-focused and directed activities.** Students who are less proficient readers, English language learners, and students with disabilities will often require explicit instruction and modeling. Student-focused activities may assist students in gaining numerous skills, but they need to be balanced with teacher-directed lessons that provide explicit instruction by the teacher. Clearly stating expectations, modeling what students are to do, providing examples of finished projects, and explicitly teaching vocabulary words, reading comprehension strategies, and strategies for approaching text in a strategic, active way are necessary for these students' success. Other students can benefit from this explicitness of instruction as well. Being explicit does not mean watering down or dumbing down the curriculum; it means making it explicit so that all students can access it.